‘A Different Form of BVMs’

“Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . .”

Like the words in Robert Frost’s poem, the women who share their reflections in this article stood at the juncture of two paths years ago.

Today, they have found that—although they “could not travel both”—the path first taken merged with the second throughout their lives.

In July 2012, members of the Set of 1962 gathered at Mount Carmel for the 50th anniversary of the date they entered the BVM community.

The reunion was organized by former BVM Judith Farrell Boston (Monica Marie), a San Francisco native taught by BVM sisters.

“My time in the BVM community helped me to learn who I was. That self-knowledge was important in helping me mature,” Judith says. “As a BVM sister living in Chicago, I was exposed to many issues of social justice. Those experiences became a foundation in my life for my sense of compassion and justice.”

After leaving the BVM sisters, Judith went to live with her friend, Jacqueline Reese (Jacqueline Marie), a former sister who left the community a year before. Judith married, raised a family, and taught high school mathematics for many years in Iowa.

Jacqueline, originally from Cedar Falls, Iowa, always wanted to be a BVM sister.

“The ‘60s instilled in us a need to serve,” says Jacqueline.

But the era was also a time of global upheaval. “I felt I could do what I was doing outside of religious life,” she says.

It was an extremely difficult decision to leave this beloved community.”

Jacqueline went on to teach elementary school for 33 years. “The values I gained with the BVMs have carried me through life and continue to have an impact. They opened my eyes to the disparity in our country, civil rights, the poor, the homeless and beyond.”

Catherine Fish Riley (Bernard Maura), from Grayslake, Ill., followed her sister Mary (Laurian Mary) into the BVM community after Catherine graduated from college.

“I saw my choice as a way for me to give service to God and others,” she says.

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Donor Profile
Tim McCormick—Keeping Up a Family Tradition

Timothy T. McCormick's family has had a “long and deep connection” with the BVM sisters in his native Lincoln, Ill.

“St. Patrick School and Parish were already established when my family arrived from Ireland, so they had a BVM school and education from the start,” Tim says. “My great-grandmother is quoted as saying, ‘I’d give half of the family finances to support the school and the sisters,’ and her seven immigrant children immediately enrolled.”

Tim still lives in Lincoln with his wife, Liana. He is president of the McCormick family-owned Farmers State Bank in Emeden, a small farming community 12 miles away.

Thirteen young women from Tim’s hometown entered the BVM community. The last of these sisters, Sister Mary Davids Devine, died in 2006.

In later years, Tim’s daughters Carina and Adina graduated from Carroll Catholic High School (which replaced St. Patrick School). Liana taught English for two years at Carroll during the last years of the BVM presence there.

Tim has an abundance of BVM memories. “The first BVM I ever knew even before I started at St. Pat’s was my father’s childhood friend Sister Mary Janelle Janssen from little Emeden,” he recalls.

Though both first and second grades were challenging for him, Tim says, “I gained a huge respect for my teacher, Sister Mary Marjorie (Patricia Ann Donahoe). Even then, I appreciated the immense undertaking Sister faced each day with an antiquated classroom, 60-plus baby boomer children in one room—and the challenge of introducing each child to reading, writing and arithmetic, plus beginning our religious education.”

He believes the first and second years of school are two of the most important years in a student’s educational life. “How Sister Mary Marjorie faced that job each morning—I’d love to know her secret. I admire the energy and challenge it must have taken.”

Tim notes a few of the many BVMs he remembers: “grandmotherly Sister Mary (St.) Gregory Emmenderfer, who transformed white paper into stars and snowflakes; Sister Lucillia Shannon, the music teacher with a nice smile; outgoing Sister Bridget Ann Henderson; and intelligent Sister Mary Francia Hanrahan.”

“Yes, I remember the BVMs,” Tim reflects, “and I am very grateful for my Catholic education. I might add that my religion defines me; I try not to define my religion. I am just keeping up a family tradition in our support of the sisters.”

Sister Spotlight
Sister Donna Schauf, BVM (Blanche)

When you enjoy a chat at Mount Carmel with Sister Donna Schauf, BVM, the phrase “surrounded by love” is one she uses often.

The oldest of three children, Sister Donna grew up in Wichita, Kan., taught by BVMs at St. Joseph Grade School and Mount Carmel Academy.

“The love and joy of the sisters helped me hear the call to be a BVM, and I have been surrounded by love for the past 57 years,” she says.

Sister Donna taught elementary school children of various ethnic backgrounds in Illinois, Iowa and Missouri. “Being involved in teaching students of many cultures helped to broaden my tolerance and understanding of other people,” she shares.

In the Bootheel of Missouri, Sister Donna ministered in social service work with families through the Headstart program. She was administrator, director and teacher for the David Preschool in Kentucky, where she also tutored young women to help them earn their GEDs. “I realized again how important education is, because it changed their lives,” she says.

Sister Donna went on to serve in parish and pastoral care ministry in Kansas and later at Mount Carmel, which she found “very rewarding.”

She adds, “I don’t have a favorite ministry, but have found life and hopefully brought life in all my missions.”

Today she serves as a volunteer, working in the development office as part of the Sisters’ Development Network, updating donors on all the current and upcoming events at Mount Carmel.

She loves to sing in the schola (choir), and is currently facilitating, with another BVM, a 12-week class, “A Celebration of Our Own Aging,” at Mount Carmel.

“If there is a theme to my life and ministry,” says Sr. Donna, “it would be gratitude to God for all the love I received from all the people in my life.”
St. Paul Alumnae Continue to Live Out BVM Values

St. Paul High School was established by St. Paul Parish in San Francisco in 1917. Initially it began with a three-year commercial program and later a four-year academic program.

BVM sisters provided the school’s principal and staff through St. Paul’s 77-year history. Over 5,000 women graduated from St. Paul and many more attended. Over the years, more than 100 graduates entered the BVM community.

The permanent high school building was constructed and occupied in 1925, the same year that the St. Paul High School Alumnae Association was formed.

Today the association numbers over 3,100 members, and the group has maintained strong ties to the BVM sisters since its beginning.

Mary McCarron Tracy, sister of Sister Mary Anna Michael McCarron, BVM, was the first alumnae association president. BVM Associate Marilyn Highlander-Pool (class of 1963) is the current president.


In March 2012, the St. Paul HS Alumnae Association partnered with the BVM development office at Mount Carmel to sponsor a bus trip to view the Women & Spirit exhibit in Sacramento. Over 100 people enjoyed the event.

Each spring, the association sponsors a fundraiser and reception for its major outreach, raising at least $30,000 each year. True to the BVM core values of freedom, education, charity and justice, outreach funds are used to help women and children living on the margins of society in San Francisco and to help cover Catholic education tuition costs for alumnae family members. The alumnae association has also given over $90,000 to the BVMs since its inception.

Throughout the years the activities and needs of St. Paul HS Alumnae Association have changed, but the spirit of loyalty, cooperation and service remains vibrant.

Sister Spotlight

Sister Joyce Cox, BVM (Petrine)

As a young Mormon girl growing up in Butte, Mont., Sister Joyce Cox’s journey to Catholicism and the BVMs began on a cold winter morning when she and her father saw six BVM sisters, dressed in black from head to toe, walking in the snow to St. Joseph Church.

“One day I will be one of them,” she thought. Years later, on Sept. 8, 1949, she entered the Sisters of Charity, BVM.

Today, Sister Joyce looks back on her early years of teaching in Iowa, Illinois and California with awe at being able to manage classes numbering 50-plus students.

“I was told by Sister Mary Armella Shea (at Most Holy Redeemer in San Francisco) that if I could not control and teach all those children, I would be answering the office phone . . . you can imagine the energy that went into my response,” Sister Joyce recalls.

That energy has been the hallmark of her ministries after teaching. Her year of service with other BVMs on the Elementary Education Commission seared into her mind and heart the belief that “where one BVM is, there is the whole congregation.”

As dean of students at Mundelein College in Chicago, Sister Joyce learned cherished lessons from multicultural students about civil and human rights.

Ten years of ministering in leadership at Bellarmine Preparatory High School in Tacoma, Wash., instilled a new meaning of leadership in Sister Joyce.

For nearly 25 years she has served in various administrative roles in the Archdiocese of Seattle, including vice-chancellor, vicar for religious, superintendent for Catholic schools, and director of spirituality. She is now director for ecumenism/interreligious dialogue and director for religious.

“Grace and grit in living this treasured religious life over some 63 years remains a ‘pearl of great price,’” she says. “Now, I too, ‘leave the future to God.’”
Did You Know?

Writing a check isn’t the only way you can make a gift to the Sisters of Charity, BVM—

- You can give appreciated stocks, bonds or mutual fund shares;
- Make the Sisters of Charity, BVM a beneficiary of your will or revocable trust, creating a gift that costs you nothing during your lifetime; or
- Give life insurance you no longer need.

It’s easier than you think to make a gift that makes a difference.

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After leaving the BVM community, Catherine went on to marry, raise a family, and teach high school English in Chicago.

“The BVM community continues to have an impact on my life,” she says. “My need of quiet time to think, my desire to remain an active member of the world, and to serve others, all reflect my time in the community.”

As the three former BVMs look back on the reunion, Jacqueline notes that “Sister Mary Ann Ida Gannon once said ‘we are not former BVMs, just a different form of BVMs.’ We felt that warmth from the welcoming arms of the BVMs at Mount Carmel. Now our set not only has a past, but we have a future together.”

Catherine shares, “Many BVMs are women I admire. It is important to me to help support them as they age. With fewer members young enough to bring in income and the loss of students who will grow up and help contribute, the community needs financial support. The BVMs were a very important influence in my life so I wish to continue contact with the community.”

Jacqueline adds, “I have an obligation to give back to them for all they have given me and I do this lovingly. I will always remain connected to them. The women who helped our formation touched me in so many ways and I am most grateful to them.”

“The reunion proved to be more than I imagined it would be,” says Judith. “Even though we ended up traveling different paths, I will always feel great affection for ‘my sisters.’ I am still indebted to the BVM community for the wonderful education I received. This was a great gift.”

Do You Have Special Prayer Intentions?

The ministry of prayer is an important ministry of all BVM sisters, but especially for those who live at Mount Carmel.

If you have special intentions for our sisters to include in their daily prayers, you can make your requests in two easy ways:

Online at: http://www.bvmcong.org/support_prayer_request.cfm
Or call: 563.588.2351 ext. 5554

Generosity is giving more than you can, and pride is taking less than you need. —Kahlil Gibran (1883 – 1931)